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ABSTRACT

Because traditional performance measures may not accurately assess what students learn or are taught, some K-12 classroom teachers, states, and teacher preparation programs are beginning to use portfolio assessment to document learning and growth in learning over time. Portfolio assessment is considered a more authentic way of evaluating and establishing student progress throughout the learning process, and of showing the relationship between classroom performance and performance in "real" situations. Many educators see portfolios as one of the better ways to get students to invest in their learning and to provide an adequate portrayal of how students' learning improves or changes over time. Concerns with portfolio assessment include: the amount of time required to review portfolios and furnish worthwhile feedback; the difficulty of establishing reliability and validity; and the "authenticness" of portfolio assessment itself. Portfolio use in the education programs at five institutions is examined: Central Washington University, Jacksonville State University (Alabama), Montana State University, Saginaw Valley State University (Michigan), and SUNY-Plattsburgh (New York). The paper concludes with a discussion of faculty and student perceptions on the use of portfolios. (Contains 17 references.) (ND)

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PORTFOLIOS: AUTHENTICALLY ASSESSING THE DIVERSITY OF INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES (?)

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Introduction

Accurate and beneficial assessment and measurement of performance has always been a major concern of eductators. States, schools and school districts, colleges and universities, the nation itself, all measure in some form or fashion the learning levels of students as they move through the various stages of education, whether they are in the grades (e.g., K-12) or in college/university courses or programs. Additionally, accrediting bodies expect that such measurement is done consistently and uniformly, and decisions for curriculum change are made based in part according to information provided by the assessment process. The most established mechanism by which this assessment occurs is through some form of traditional performance measure, i.e., standard curve, grades, objective testing.

At issue, especially for teachers and faculty, is that traditional performance measures may not accurately measure what students learn or are taught. Also at issue is how "authentically" traditional practices measure the relationship between classroom performance and performance in the "real" situation. The parameters of the issue have been addressed quite eloquently in the scholarly literature (see, for example, Costa, 1989; Shepard, 1989; Bracey, 1994; Wiggins, 1993; 1989; Feuer &Fulton, 1993; Stiggins, 1991; Worthen, 1993).

To more closely approximate "real" performance, some K-12 classroom teachers, states, and college/university teacher preparation programs are

beginning to use portfolio assessment to document learning and growth in learning over time. The belief is that portfolio assessment is a more authentic way of evaluating and establishing student progress throughout the learning process. In addition, those who use portfolios believe that they provide information that shows the articulation between classroom performance and performance in "real" situations.

There are concerns, however, with portfolio assessment. One major concern is time; it takes time to review portfolios and furnish worthwhile feedback. A second concern, related to the first, is that of reliability and validity. Due to the difficulty of establishing instrument reliability and validity some believe the reliability and validity of portfolios is tenuous at best. A third concern has to do with performance assessment itself. Some who question the "authenticness" of portfolio assessment believe that there may be better and more appropriate means of performance assessment, depending on the circumstances, that are as "authentic" as the use of portfolios. These concerns have been examined quite thoroughly in the scholarly literature (see, for example, Linn, 1991; Barton & Collins, 1993; Abruscato, 1993; Popham, 1993; Feuer & Fulton, 1993; Gellman, 1992-1993).

There is, however, a growing number that see portfolios as one of the better ways to get students to invest in their learning, and to provide an adequate portrayal of how students' learning improves or changes over time. Farr and Tone (1994), for instance, state that it is important to view portfolio assessment

as a shared student/teacher responsibility which allows both traditional and nontraditional forms of evaluating students' academic progress. Additionally, several writers point out the need to use multiple methods and measures in developing an 'assessment portfolio' which combines both quantitative and qualitative aspects of students' work (see, for example, Nolet, 1992; Gamel-McCormick, 1993; Keefe, 1995; Mokhtari, Yellin, Bull, & Montgomery, 1996). Farr and Tone (1994) also stress that student portfolios need to be "working" portfolios which include language that the student 'needs and wants to apply' and should not be "show" portfolios which are merely a reflection of a student's "best" work. Addressing, specifically, the assessment of teacher competence, Gellman (1992-1993) claims:

> It is abundantly clear that teaching is too complex an activity to be assessed with tests alone. Tests may be adequate for the evaluation of some of the knowledge that is a necessary component of effective teaching but we need additional assessment techniques to determine whether that knowledge is reflected in appropriate teaching behavior (p. 39).

It seems that procedures need to be implemented that assess an individual's performance in a manner that is more holistically representative of that performance. We suggest that the use of portfolios may be a beginning point for providing such information.

Portfolio Assessment in Practice

The balance of this paper will address portfolio use in the education programs in the various institutions we represent. In addition, we will look at opinions of faculy and students concerning the use of portfolios.

1. Central Washington University

At Central Washington University, there has been (and continues to be) an ongoing dialogue about the use of portfolios as reliable and valid assessment tools. The debate continues to focus on the type of assessment portfolio falls into, i.e., content, performance, attitudinal (affective). Questions abound. Is it performance or content? Is it valid or reliable? How do you control for cheating on portfolios? Faculty in the secondary program and those in the teacher preparation colleges seem not at all interested.

Only one program, special education, has adopted the portfolio as its end-of-major assessment and that portfolio has a very behavioristic orientation and focusses on learned knowledge and skills which are observable. The affective domain is not considered important, but the faculty do ask for student reflection. Students are required to take a three-quarter-hour assessment course which focusses on the portfolio to be used as the end-of-major assessment.

Faculty in the early childhood education program collect student work into a form of portfolio which is used for job search efforts (much as an artist's portfolio) as opposed to assessment. They have developed no assessment criteria similar to that of the special education faculty.

The elementary education faculty have a somewhat neutral attitude toward portfolios which is a change from their overall negative attitude over the past few years. They do not feel, however, that portfolios are the one and only assessment tool as do the special education faculty. They have no plans to develop portfolio assessment in the future citing a lack of available resources. In addition, some faculty have noted that CWU's teacher education programs are supposed to be following a constructivist model and that portfolios, as used in special education, do not.

The current dean, a behaviorist and special education faculty member, has been advocating that all programs develop some form of portfolio assessment as the end-of-major assessment. The educational reform movement in Washington state is also advocating performance assessment and portfolio use.

A few years ago the university brought in a nationally known consultant on assessment who was not a strong proponent of portfolios as performance assessment. He asserted that portfolios used for job searches are a totally different form of portfolio than one used for assessment. He further claimed that teacher education has always had the best form of performance assessment, and that was student teaching. Most faculty involved in teacher education at CWU agree.

2. Jacksonville State University

At Jacksonville State University, the closest we have come to a portfolio-type

of assessment is our mandatory student teaching notebook. The notebook includes the following items, (a) an autobiography, (b) a personal philosophy of education, (c) a daily log, (d) a reflective journal with weekly entries, (e) lesson plans, curriculum materials, and tests related to lessons taught, (f) a unit plan, (g) at least two bulletin board designs, (h) observation/evaluation forms completed by the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor, and (i) additional materials related to school operations and functions. The notebook is examined by the university supervisor on each site visit and is used to monitor progress and identify issues for discussion with the student teacher and/or the cooperating teacher.

Although the notebook is supposed to count as one-fourth of the final student teaching grade, there are no real criteria for assessment beyond completeness, neatness, and attractiveness of the notebook. To evolve into a true portfolio assessment, the faculties of the various teacher education programs (i.e., early childhood, elementary, physical education, secondary, special education) will need to assume "ownership" of the enterprise from the office of clinical experiences which created the notebook. In the process, faculty will have to address the purpose of the portfolio, as well as identify appropriate rubrics for assessment of the various elements.

3. Montana State University

Similar to Jacksonville State, portfolio assessment at Montana State University consists of a student teaching portfolio. The student teaching

portfolio at Montana State, however, is optional, but most students do maintain a portfolio. Information for each student teacher is stored in a "portfolio" in the student teaching office and the teacher placement office. Each student teacher's portfolio contains (a) letters of recommendation from college supervisors and public school supervisors, (b) audio- and/or video-tapes of lessons and meetings, selected by each student teacher, (c) student evaluations for each visit by the college supervisor and the public school supervisor, (d) an audio or video summary of the total experience by both student teacher and supervisors, (e) samples of creative material which suggest possible uniqueness of each student teacher, (f) exit interviews by student teacher and supervisors, (g) a written summary be each student teacher of the total student teaching experience.

The University Supervisor determines whether the information included in the portfolio is acceptable and appropriate. Criteria for inclusion are basically the subjective opinions of the supervisor. Since the portfolio is optional, it is not used for end-of-program assessment. Once student teaching is completed, the portfolio is most often transferred to the teacher placement office for use in job searches, and review by prospective employers.

4. Saginaw Valley State University

At Saginaw Valley State Univesity, portfolios have become an important tool for establishing readiness for entrance to the education programs and monitoring progress as students move through their programs.

At the undergraduate level, portfolios are maintained in the Office of Clinical Experiences for any student who has satisfactorily completed all prerequisites for admission to a teacher preparation (elementary or secondary) program and, subsequently, has been admitted. Faculty in each methods-type course designate specific assignments to be included in the portfolios. Assignments to be included vary according to program, but typically are units completed for a course and lessons taught infieldwork placements; additionally, supervisory evaluations of teaching and course grades are included. Portfolios are used specifically to monitor progress through a program and for admission to student teaching. Students have the option to take their portfolios with them on completion of student teaching; portfolios not claimed by students are discarded.

At the graduate level, portfolios are used to determine admission to a masters' level program, and to monitor progress through that program. Students are expected to maintain their portfolios and submit them in a timely manner. Portfolios are to be submitted at least three times (at the beginning of the program, in the middle of the program, and at the end of the program) to the student's faculty advisor. Unlike the undergraduate portfolios which have all information to be included designated by the faculty, the masters-level portfolios have required information as well as "student choice" information. Information for the graduate portfolios include (a) the student's written evaluation of the contents of the portfolio, (b) a written statement of philosophy including a list of

goals to be accomplished during the graduate program, (c) letters of reccomendation, (d) graded examples of "best" coursework from each graduate-level course completed, (e) one-page summaries for each graduate course that discusses possible action research projects, (f) an up-to-date outline of the student's plan for graduate study.

In addition to the portfolios that are required by programs, certain courses within education and also in the disciplines (typically art & English) base student performance and assigning of grades in part on portfolios. Students in such courses at first seem surprised that they will be expected to maintain a portfolio and review it at specified times during the semester; however, by the end of a course common comments are "it has been really helpful to watch my progression" and "the portfolio has been an excellent mechanism for me to keep all of my coursework together in a structured way. Usually all of my 'stuff' from a course is scattered here and there and eventually is lost."

Most faculty at Saginaw Valley are positive about the use of portfolios. Few faculty, though, seem to do anything with them. Concerns about portfolios revolve around time for adequate review, designing a reliable and valid assessment rubric, and (particularly at the program level where specific coursework has to be included) a concern related to academic freedom regarding who might be reviewing graded information and for what reasons. Also, education students often say that they are "told" about alternative

assessment practices in their methods classes, but they continue to be evaluated by traditional means. These same students are not necessarily expecting to be evaluated using portfolios, but they do think that a performance-based assessment consistent with the processes used to learn the information would be in order.

5. SUNY-Plattsburgh

At SUNY-Plattsburgh, the Reading Center has developed a portfolio assessment format for use by student and preservice/inservice teachers working in a university setting. "The purpose of good assessment is to inform instruction and, simultaneously, to provide students, parents, administrators, and the public with accurate and meaningful information regarding students' progress" (Gillespie, Ford, Gillespie, Leavell, 1996, p. 480). Consistent with this purpose, the main aims of the "literacy" portfolio at SUNY-Plattsburgh's Reading Center are to ensure that children have the opportunity to become proficient and realistic in the self-assessment of their own educational progress and to enable them to present a wide variety of their academic and artistic accomplishments in literacy and language using a variety of genre and media applications.

A typical portfolio contains the following data:

a. The student's work, consisting of

1. samples of actual classroom activities (oral and written)

2. formal test results(usually from the student's school)

3. informal test results (from the Reading Center)

4. interest inventories

5. "getting to know you" questionnaires and background sheets

6. reading logs, journal entries, computer printouts

b. The teacher's planning, consisting of

1. a statement of teaching philosophy/objectives

2. lesson plans

3. journal entries

4. previous case study reports

5. checklists of literacy needs

c. The parents' input, consisting of

1. surveys of the student's needs

2. the student's medical history

3. feedback information for the teacher

4. signed permission slips for possible field trips, photos, use of data, etc.

The literacy portfolio consists of three major components, (a) the ongoing work of the student, (b) the educational planning of teachers and other professionals, and (c) the concerns and interests of the parents or caregivers. In this way the literacy portfolio serves both as a holistic assessment of student achievement in a classroom setting and as a monitoring instrument for the pre-service and inservice training of teachers.

Conclusion

There appears to be some variation in the design of portfolios and the purposes for which they are used; however, it seems the primary intent is to provide a more balanced representation of performance. Some institutions require portfolios, for monitoring progress, for displaying change in performance over time, for job searches. In some institutions, portfolios are used optionally and sporadically. Whether required or optional, students seem to appreciate their portfolios because the portfolio becomes a mechanism for storage and display, and documenting change in learning over time.

There also is concern, though, about using portfolios. Such concern on the part of faculty revolves around reliability and validity (i.e., the objectivity) of measure as well as the time it takes to appropriately review each portfolio. Also, some faculty see portfolios as collections of information with no real purpose, and, unfortunately, that often is what they are. Additionally, there may be confusion about the purpose. Is, for example, the portfolio to be used for monitoring progress, for displaying performance, for job searches, or for all three? Lacking a specific definition of purpose, it is difficult to determine what information needs to be in a portfolio. An additional concern is one of academic freedom, i.e.,who will view the material in the portfolio, and, again, for what purpose.

Students also express frustration, especially when methods faculty "talk about" alternative assessment practices and then assess in traditional manners.

These students believe that faculty should be assessing in a manner similar to what they are recommending to the students. Students are not necessarily in favor of portfolios, but they do want "authentic" performance-based assessments.

The faculty at Central Washington, at Jacksonville State, at Montana State, at Saginaw Valley State, and at SUNY-Plattsburgh continue to try portfolios as measures of student performance, and they continue to debate the authenticity of portfolio measurement. Investigation is healthy; debate is healthy. Answers may not always be provided, but the result often is growth and a more focussed understanding of a process.

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